

## Synthesist Imaginary and Recyclage

Mark Bartlett

The SF writer is able to dissolve the normal absolute quality that the objects (our actual environment, our daily routine) have; he has cut us loose enough to put us in a third space, neither the concrete nor the abstract, but something unique, something connected to both and hence relevant...

Philip K. Dick

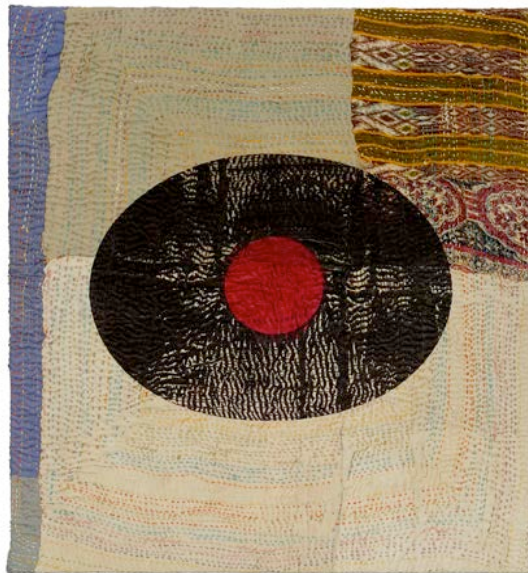
I

Kindred spirits are rare. So when Shezad Dawood and I met, and discovered that we were both fascinated by ufology, obsessed with science fiction, had a love for esoterica, and a deep distrust of rationalism and aestheticism, we began an exchange that has been fecund indeed. So I will be personal and playful here, which is appropriate because both he and I are committed to a very different discourse and type of inquiry than what the myth of objectivity offers. Because there are stakes in both writing and art, we are committed explorers of cliff edges, aporias, paradoxes, and gravitate to loci where well-defined boundaries and disciplines break down, where well-established methods and aesthetic forms fade out so that other experiences, knowledges, and perceptions can fade in. In order to put the reader in the right frame of mind for what follows, I'll mention three points on the long arc through time that will at least give a skeletal shape to the problem of semiocentrism, by which I mean the dominance of language over all aspects of the non-linguistic, over art.

The first goes back to ancient Greece. You may recall that Socrates refused to write. He believed that knowledge could only be gained through active dialogue, that it was inherently social in nature because it could only be achieved through debate and consensus building in the agora, and not the passive mode of reading alone at one's desk. It had to be practised through persuasion to be knowledge at all. Thus, when Plato put philosophy in the form of the literary dialogue, it became a mere imitation of the real thing. He had become the very Ion he'd originally condemned – inspired but not knowledgeable.<sup>1</sup> From that point on, writing took over and its social character was abandoned. The second moment arrived with the rise of Neo-Platonism, when 'social status' was beginning to cohere into its modern form.<sup>2</sup> Language, and therefore the writer, was granted the highest social status in the Renaissance because it was a type of reason shaped by definitive principles of rhetoric. Artists, on the other hand, were then still mere artisans, akin to bricklayers and shoemakers. They were viewed as physical labourers, capable of imitating the products of a rational mind only through manual skill, but considered incapable of reason itself. Leonardo and his compeers, therefore, had low social status, though eventually they achieved upward mobility by appropriating mathematics, in the form of geometry, as a way to legitimise their work as knowledge. Perspective derives from that impulse. The last moment I'll mention is the last part of the twentieth century, and is referred to as the 'linguistic turn'. The most famous example, though terribly misunderstood, is Derrida's claim: *Il n'y a pas de hors-texte* [There is nothing

outside of the text].<sup>3</sup> Linguistic analysis became the paradigm for all legitimate theoretical analysis, producing the strange obsession with turning everything into a text to be parsed. Film, painting, advertising, fashion, cars, wrestling, you name it, were considered assemblages of signs and reduced to, and by, semiotic analysis. I wish to avoid exactly that here. Derrida intended his claim to be critical, not a proposition of certitude. His proposition was interrogative, should be interpreted as a question: so, what now, given that language is the legitimiser of truth, is the unquestionable case? What lies between Socratic speech and philosophical linguisticism? And, if the sign is dethroned, then what? How to consider the visual and auditory independently of language? Might they constitute knowledge? He said: 'yes'.

Thus Shezad Dawood's works will here be understood not merely as objects of beauty served up to our aesthetic gaze, but as catalysts to knowledge, not simply cognitive knowledge, but something much more eccentric, and, at times, profound. Something more akin to what Walter Benjamin called 'illuminations', that emerge from constellations of ideas, emotions, intuitions, and experiences. We might think of Dawood's works as akin to talismans, which reveal powers or worlds hidden in the midst of our everyday existence, in a third imaginary-material zone between fact and fiction.



Iris, 2010, Saami textile, paint

In order to allow Dawood's work to speak for itself, my view is that writing must not strive to dictate what an artwork is *about*, but should put itself in a humble, inquisitive *relation to it* that keeps some professional distance in which works can speak for themselves. It must create a structure for it that isn't a 'frame'. Art, when it is persuasive, that is, social, is that which insists on defenestration. This is particularly true of Dawood's diverse, yet intricately interconnected body of work. His practice is about taking frames apart, and reassembling them in

unexpected ways to transform expected views in unexpected ways. *Iris* might in this regard be considered Dawood's visual manifesto; here he mobilises a matrix of cultural references that critically situates his work in globalisation's mash-up of cultural and economic flows:

'Saami textiles are from Sindh province, which contains the city of Karachi where I spent a short time living as a kid. I seem to source mainly from the 70s. I love these quilts for their default syncretism. Basically the 70s saw a real expansion of industrial-scale textile manufacture in Pakistan, with fabrics and pattern-ways from Africa, Japan and Europe mishing and mashing. Interestingly, these quilts were made by nomadic weavers. This idea of the parallel or multiple narrative possibilities of these quilts as surfaces is what interests me...'<sup>4</sup>

The Saami nomads of Sindh are not pre-moderns then; they are contemporary master bricoleurs of global cultural flows, and it is with them that Dawood collaborates in the aesthetic labour of synthesising disseminated differences and layers that yet cohere in the literal and conceptual weave of *Iris*. Hence, I prefer the metaphor of 'landscape' to frame, precisely because his aesthetic strategy intends to be 'frameless' in its insistent heterogeneity, and because it aims to give equal significance to each narrative catalyst. The Lote tree, the Brahma bull in the field, the Indus valley river and its hilly, green perimeter are arranged without compositional hierarchy.

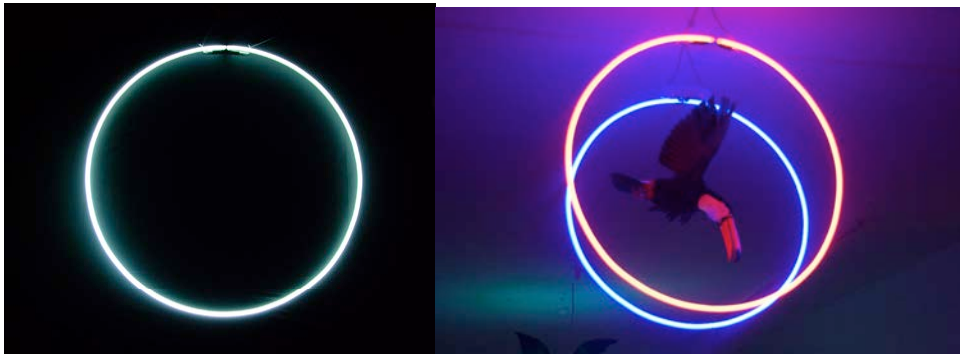
Another metaphor might be choreography, the configuring of ideas, affects, imaginaries in continuous flux while using narrative only to put it in question. As Merce Cunningham once wrote: 'if there are no fixed points [in space], then every point is equally interesting and equally changing.'<sup>5</sup> The following relativist geography of Dawood's art practice will evoke the multiple occluded and open views of his nomadic choreography, to give the reader a visually-linguistic vantage point from which to view his work, which will turn out to be from the moon, perhaps the historically most venerable UFO and symbol of his, and our, synthesist imaginary. Dawood's neon sculptures, textile paintings, and films are developed synchronously in order to set up resonances between them, between the moon and its own dark side, and ourselves as active investigators of its double-sidedness. Its dark side, remember, remains forever invisible, at least to the earthbound iris. In effect, then, each individual work takes its place in a single oeuvre constructed as an assemblage of unfixed points, while each individual one suggests possible reflections on the others. Their exhibition, then, is less about the discreteness of individual pieces than about the resonances Dawood establishes among them through principle – *I'll n' y a pas de hors-image*.

II

Perhaps more than any other astronomical object, even more than the sun, the moon has been the great inspiration of poetry, myth, proto-religions, and mysticism, not to mention the very first photograph and one of the very first films. My lunar history begins with an experimentalist novelist and a poet. When I got to page 23 of Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, in the chapter entitled 'Lightness', I was quite struck by what he says there of Leopardi:

'The appearances of the moon in his poetry do not take up many lines, but they are enough to shed the light of the moon on the whole poem, or else project upon it the shadow of its absence.'<sup>6</sup>

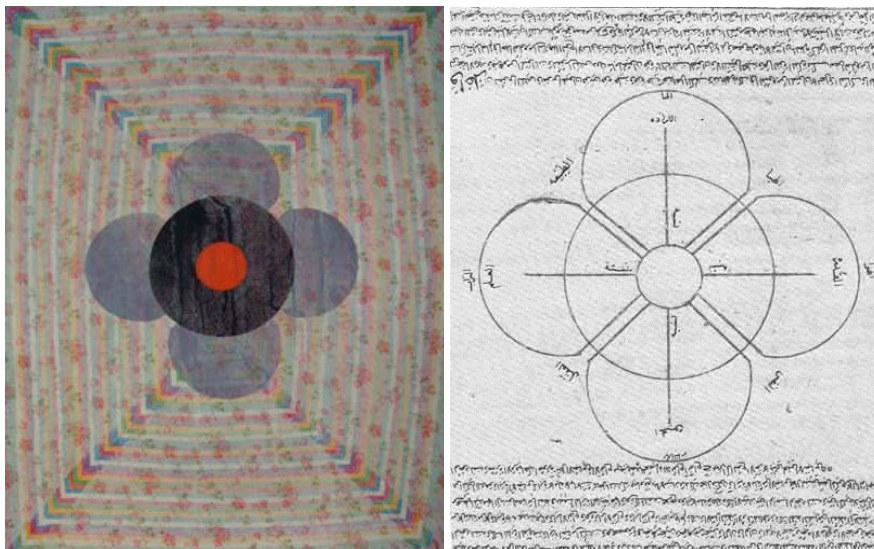
I have not, nor has Dawood, read Leopardi's work. But we have no doubt that what Calvino says of him must also be said of himself. We have a first glimpse here of his great subtlety. For he attributes a double aspect to Leopardi's lunar sensitivity: it sheds the moon's light, or, it projects the shadow of its absence. In other words, an eclipse is an aspect of the moon's lightness. Direct illumination, in other words, is bound to be indirect, mediated projection – the earth's shadow cast by the sun on the full moon's surface.



Left: Black Sun, neon, date?; Right: Jewels of Aptom III, 2010

Calvino explained this further when he called for 'a literature that breathes philosophy and science but keeps its distance and dissolves, with a slight puff of air, not only theoretical abstractions but also the apparent concreteness of reality.' When Dawood read these lines of my lunar history, he no doubt thought of the words of the Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi, an important source of inspiration for him: 'When one wishes to penetrate this Earth...', says Arabi, 'the condition to be fulfilled is the practice of gnosis... He encounters the forms that by divine order stand watch at the entrances of the avenues... this Earth has the characteristic of giving to all who enter it the understanding of all the languages that are spoken on it.'<sup>7</sup> The 'Earth' referred to is not the secular Earth of mundane existence, but its eclipsed twin entwined with it, like the moon's dark side, accessible only through the practice of gnosis, of *seeing through* the mundane into a world only knowable, spiritually, through imagination. Seeing through in this way locates us somewhere between theoretical abstraction and concrete reality. Arabi's Earth might also be, as Dawood suggests, the post-apocalyptic planet of Samuel Delany's science fiction novel *The Jewels of Aptom*.<sup>8</sup> With this allusion, every other bird of the night takes flight through this double ringed portal. Such is the syncretic force of these neon sculptures – they function mnemonically, like the condensation of images in dreams – that, when pushed on a bit, spring open like a box of tricks. At the same time, this animated bird of night flies a trajectory through, and beyond, art history's geography that recalls and displaces Nauman and Flavin; the toucan's taxidermic authenticity adds a new line of flight to the caricature of the former, and the abstraction of the

latter. The toucan, concretely, was once a living, specific bird, yet its simulated particularity is the puff of air that dissolves theoretical abstraction, as its science-fictional preservation dissolves concrete realism. The toucan becomes simultaneously a Gnostic form and allegory of passage to Arabi's Earth and to Delany's Aptom. Through it, we understand all the languages spoken in those places; in other words, each frame of reference translates the other, making a Sufi of Delany and a science-fiction writer of Arabi.



Left: Ibn Arabi's Flower, 2010, Saami textile, paint; Arabi's Cosmological 8-star diagram

The *Koran*, more than any other religious text, puts Calvino's lunar imagination at its centre. It tells us: 'It is not you who cast the dart when you cast it, but Allah who casts it. And yet, yes, it is you who cast it; and yet, no, it is not you who cast it.'<sup>9</sup> Corbin translates this koan as the heart of Islam's teachings: 'When you create, it is not you who create, and that is why your creation is true. It is true because each creature has a twofold dimension: the Creator-creature typifies the *coincidentia oppositorum*.'<sup>10</sup> It puts, according to Arabi, that imagination of the *twofold* at the centre of 'religion' that brings the *coincidentia oppositorum* into imaginative practice, both sides of the moon are synthesised by imagination. Derrida (an Algerian)<sup>11</sup> had named Dawood's *Arabi's Flower*, *differance* (to differ, and, to defer).<sup>12</sup> He too thinks that the creative imagination is theophanic in Islam's unique sense; that the creator is coincident with the creature who imagines, that the twofold opposition is a co-produced synthetic event of imagination, as it is for Calvino, of which the conception of authorial, singular genius is the antithesis, and replaced by the act of witnessing. Dawood's marginalia, in Corbin's *Alone with the Alone* he so generously lent me, gloss this lunar landscape repeatedly. One finds penned there in scratchy hand: 'Visualisation is always twofold'; a process we find embodied as *Iris* merges synthetically with the parallel narratives synthesised in *Black Sun's* combination with *Ibn Arabi's Flower*. The aporias of otherness, expressed in the cross-resonance of these works, trace abstractly-concrete patterns available only to a

Gnostic synthesist imaginary able to hold repelling magnetic poles together. Dawood refers to his process as that of a 'transcendentalist mechanic'.



Dream Machine, 2011

And that flower continues to bloom in the radiant complexity of his *New Dream Machine*, a dialogical 'appropriation' of Brion Gysin's 1960s eponymous work.<sup>13</sup> I've put that overly general art historical term in quotes in order to distance Dawood's work from it; his own term, given to a prototype miniature dream machine, *Recyclage* (2011), is far more playful, accurate, and productive. It refers in one sense to the literal materiality of the work that is made from tin food containers by local craftsmen in Morocco; and in another embodies a fabulous Sufi humour and 'serious' inventiveness. Because it conflates, with synthesist precision, the term 'recycle' with its art historical kin, 'collage': it suggests not confiscation, but transmogrification of something for an entirely new purpose.



Khalid constructing a miniature dream machine, L'appartement 22, Fes, 2011

Dawood's *New Dream Machine* recycles Gysin's. Functionally, both versions are essentially redesigns of the zoetrope, in which the perforated surface of a cylinder rotates on a turntable around a light source, projecting luminous pulses on a participant's closed eyelids, in order to simulate the brain's alpha-



Shezad Dawood experimenting with prototype New Dream Machine, 2011

Alexandra P. Spaulding

**Comment:** The original image has another person – Abdellah Karoom – to the left. It should not be cropped, but used in its original staged entirety

wave patterns of dreaming during the REM phase of sleep. Formally, the *New Dream Machine* is a type of anti-art: not meant to be consumed visually and passively, but experienced 'directly' and actively as light transmits and stimulates 'dreams' along the optic nerves, which, anatomically speaking, are external extensions of the brain. Historically, it recalls the radical spirit of *Pensée* [Thought 1968] that raised 'cultural miscegenation' to a political aesthetic principle. Dawood himself has noted this, rightly criticising the ways in which art history's "Occidentalist" reading [of Gysin] reappropriates all to itself, effectively denying the influences of Islam and Sufism on his work and thought.<sup>14</sup> The Gysin-Burroughs-Sommerville (artist-writer-scientist) moment is recalled for its significance for our present; it allows us to re-encounter, critically, the intermixing of *Pensée 68* with 'eastern' cultural traditions. The dream it reproduces anew is a challenge to the prevailing view, then and now, that 'eastern' influences on art practices of the 1960s signified only the Far East of Japanese and Indian Buddhism. What Dawood reasserts with his *New Dream Machine* is the fundamental links of that period and the more marginal alliances between segments of the avant-garde, and our Islamophobic present.

Dawood's work philosophically allies itself with the aim to dissolve the boundaries between disciplines that cultural forces typically strive to segregate – neurology, art, poetry, music, and their *coincidentia oppositorum*, mysticism as both belief and knowledge. It exemplifies the aesthetic strategy of recyclage in this way: 'The recirculation (and inheritance) of forms, histories and motifs,' he tells us, 'lies at the heart of my practice.'<sup>15</sup> We must, in the case of his iteration, (dream machines after all constitute a genre that includes literature, hallucinogens, music, trance, cinema, TV, hypnosis, and magic), sum Dawood's series of terms in that of 're-enactment.' But *New Dream Machine* re-enacts not simply the apparatus and its purpose, but the spirit and forces of the time that gave rise to them, a salient network of historical places, people, objects, events and aesthetic practices. It dreams again the collaborative ventures in the inter-zone *between*

the Moroccan, Bedouin Master Musicians of Jajouka, whose musical form has been described as 'Sufi trance' music, and Burroughs who described them as a 4000-year-old rock band;<sup>16</sup> *between* the Moroccan painter Mohamed Hamri, Gysin, and their Tangiers restaurant 1001 Nights where the former cooked while the latter arranged performances for the Jajouka musicians, then led by Jadj Abdessalam Attar; *between* these musicians and Rolling Stones founder Brian Jones who performed together at the Cinémathèque de Tanger in 1968; and the links of course go on and on. But the *New Dream Machine* is indeed new, and not. Dawood both has and hasn't cast the dart. It has been revived by being recycled with a performance (again at the Cinémathèque de Tanger) by Master Musicians of Jajouka, led now by Bachir Attar, son of Jadj, and featuring, in lieu of Jones, British musician Duke Garwood. Dawood's re-enactment revivifies in both a literal and mythic sense; the latter by a local legend that claims that if the Master Musicians ever stop playing, the Earth will stop rotating. And literally, as Bachir Attar has commented: 'You can't learn this music. You have to inherit it.'<sup>17</sup> That Attar and Dawood both lay claim to inheritance is a direct alliance with Arabi's Sufism: 'I am not a Prophet nor a Messenger but simply an inheritor...' Dawood's theophany of recycling, of inheritance, is a fundamental principle of the synthesist imaginary.

### III

Fredric Jameson has claimed that the most important form of literature of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is science fiction, because more than any other genre it is commensurate with the profound cultural changes brought about by science and technology.

'... the representational apparatus of Science Fiction, having gone through innumerable generations of technological development and well-nigh viral mutation since the onset of that movement [cyberpunk], is sending back more reliable information about the contemporary world than an exhausted realism (or an exhausted modernism either).'<sup>18</sup>



Left: George Admaski's photograph of scouts leaving the mothership from his *Inside the Spaceship*; Right: Dawood's *Inside the Spaceship*, 2011

Dawood's current film project, *Piercing Brightness*, takes on the Sci-fi apparatus like no other contemporary artist has, precisely because of the aesthetic strategies it deploys against the twin exhaustions of realism and modernism, those of the theophanic imagination of Sufism.<sup>19</sup> Currently, it consists of a



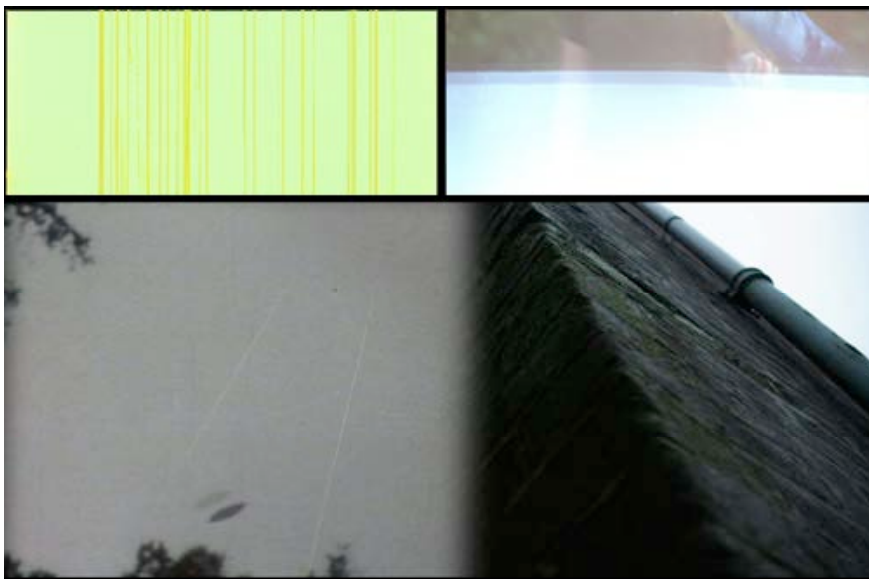
remarkable, one-off, 46-minute version shown on 1 October 2011 at the AND Festival in Liverpool, accompanied by an equally remarkable live performance by the Japanese rock/jazz band, Acid Mothers Temple;<sup>20</sup> a fifteen-minute cut entitled, *Trailer*, commissioned specifically for the exhibitions alongside which this publication appears; and a feature length film to be released in 2012. The plot is the same, though differently configured in each version; aliens return to Earth to retrieve 'the glorious 100' of their species who had been sent there decades earlier in order to 'secretly observe the birth and development of another planet for the mutual benefit of our world and their world.'<sup>21</sup> Each iteration, however, though related to is also independent of the others, and must be understood as unique works in a series produced not only for specific sites and occasions, but also as scouts, so to speak, leaving the mothership in order to send back the most reliable information about our contemporary world that simply cannot be represented in any singular form. Each, in effect, contests the representational rights of the others to lay claim to the definitive version, and we need to understand the 'work' as comprising all current and future versions. Dawood here too has applied his aesthetics of recyclage as a strategy of building the principle of inheritance into *Piercing Brightness*.

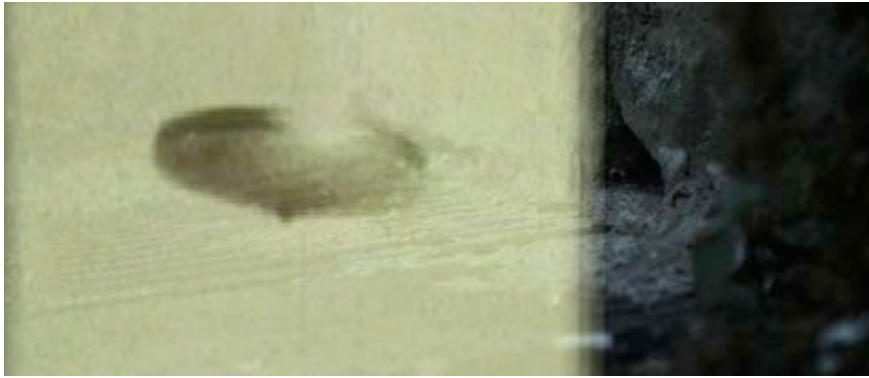
*Piercing Brightness* imagines the third space Philip K. Dick speaks about in the epigraph above, in which the normalcy of the everyday is neither concrete nor abstract, but both. It is a space in which an Arabic response to something said in Chinese is possible because it's founded on the Gnostic belief that 'this [Gnostically imagined] Earth has the characteristic of giving to all who enter it the understanding of all the languages that are spoken on it.' Though of course, all who wander from the third space risk becoming lost, as some of the film's 100 have, with variable degrees of losing their racial identity, though no more than the indigenous humans. And this is one of the central motifs of the work. Dawood, however, scrupulously avoids falling into the trap of the *bien-pensant* multiculturalist and his versions of 'identity politics'. He is opposed to such essentialist renderings of racial identities, and aims, as Paul Gilroy has put it in the subtitle of one of his books, to imagine 'political culture beyond the colour line.' *Piercing Brightness* completely concurs with Gilroy's witty interpretation of hip-hop artist, Snoop Dogg's racial politics, manifest in his wonderfully ironic substitution of 'dog-face' for black-face on his album, *Doggy Style*:

'... the ethical and political significance of Snoop's affirmation of blackness in dog-face... [is that its] simultaneous questioning of humanity and proximity can be used... to construct an argument about the positive value of intersubjectivity in black political cultures that are now subject-centered to the point of solipsism. In this sense, Snoop's dog may help to sniff out an escape route from the current impasse in thinking about racial identity.'<sup>22</sup>

Dawood's characterological, visual and musical strategies draw on a series of related aesthetic methods to represent modes of inter-subjectivities that inhabit a variety of inter-zones: an alien migration officer who inhabits the body of a middle-aged white Englishman wishes to remain on Earth; an alien who has forgotten that she's an alien, thinks she's human, and conceived a 'human' daughter who falls in love with an illegal alien from China; a South Asian

shopkeeper faithful to his alien mission, bent on return, yet who has learnt to laugh, love food and Buster Keaton. Each character affirms cultural differences with variable dog-faces (note the intercut birds and deer in the film) that point toward ways of escape from our exhausted realist modernity. *Piercing Brightness* figures such inter-subjectivity through the tropes of inter-mission and transmission visually signified, particularly in *Trailer*, by the editing method of the 'flashcut', flickering white, abstract, or collaged images that rapidly intercut the flow of indexically 'realist' sequences. It is the visual analogue of Gysin and Burroughs' cut-up method used by Dawood to cinematically imagine a third world that lies synthetically between abstraction and concreteness, where a third mind achieves a state of consciousness governed by the Sufi principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*. The soundtrack, improvised by Acid Mothers Temple, is a form of musical cut-up when paired with a science-fiction film, while flash-cutting historically between the 1970s and our present; just as the Saami quilt is overlaid with painted allusions to George Adamski's 'photographs' taken of scouts leaving the mothership.<sup>23</sup>





Inheritance of UFO film footage, and the aesthetic of 'flashcuts' between zones

*Piercing Brightness* represents neither a dystopia nor a utopia, but a heterotopia in which the struggle to achieve a state of *coincidentia oppositorum* is in progress. Dawood has designated to represent this world, the most alienated of all the film's characters; the alien hoodies who have failed to regenerate themselves through continuous migration from one human body to another, who have been trapped in a degenerated body neither human nor alien, but of some entirely new species. They are 'impure', bi-racial interspecies beings and therefore the most inter-subjective and other. They can neither return to their home world, nor become members of their adopted world. They are the 'disaffected' youth of the 2011 UK riots, and no doubt have ethical and political reasons for casting their lot in with the faction of aliens who feel abandoned by their home world and have decided to remain on Earth. Yet, they have no hope of or desire for assimilation, and represent the yearning and promise of escape from racial solipsism and the impasse of today's global identity politics. They represent the future precisely because of their hybridity, itself a figure for the possibility of a radical transformation of our exhausted historical moment.



And here we must understand Dawood's filmic strategy as a form of expanded cinema, in the specific sense originally given to it by the remarkable work of the still marginalised experimental filmmaker and techno-artist, Stan VanDerBeek, another reference he and I share. VanDerBeek first defined expanded cinema in 1965, though it came to have quite diverse interpretations in national contexts, mostly allied with the performative, multi-screen, and installation orientation of formalist, materialist film of the 1960s and 1970s, an aesthetics to which VanDerBeek was politically opposed. For this reason he coined a new term for his concept in 1971: the wonderfully eccentric and synthesist 'socialimagestics'. Images, he believed, were the new currency of cultural communication because of the enormous and global visual impact of mass media, particularly television. His work drew severe condemnation by the Brakhage-Mekas-Sitney triad for its use of moving imagery appropriated from TV, Hollywood, news reels, magazines, and the like. He was criticised to the point of exclusion for his more Situationist *détournement* of this material. *Socialimagestics* is a deliberate reference to Brecht's concept of the *gestus*, a term that is the visual and embodied equivalent to *différance*; it refers simultaneously to gesture and gist, a form of method acting

that aims to change the audience's political and social consciousness by alienating them from themselves. Dawood's political aesthetic of recycle is a type of socialimagestics in this sense.<sup>24</sup>



Dawood is the consummate synthesist whose works are syncretic patterns of connections between things in space and time, sifted out from the barrage of mass mediated, visual overload and socialimagestically *détourned* towards Calvino's lunar lightness of the moon in the afternoon.

'Nobody looks at the moon in the afternoon, and this is the moment when it would most require our attention, since its existence is still in doubt. It is a whitish shadow that surfaces from the intense blue of the sky, charged with solar light; who can assure us that, once again, it will succeed in assuming a form and glow?'<sup>25</sup>

Calvino's moon, almost an empiricist's one, alludes to the moon of the seventeenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume, who questioned: who can rationally prove, who can assure us, that the sun will rise again tomorrow? Calvino's moon is not even a Newtonian moon then. For Newton's moon was guaranteed to rise every night, performing its eternal phases while generating the ebb and flow of Earth's tides, devout cycles of the celestial machine paying homage to the Deity of Nature. Newton's moon retained vestiges of a theological moon, vestiges of a moon brought into western existence by Aristotle. Calvino's moon, as a moon in doubt, couldn't be further from Aristotle's moon, a moon without lightness, which could be neither light, nor heavy. For Aristotle, lightness was that which moved away from a centre, while heaviness was that which moved towards a centre. But that which moved circularly, moves neither towards nor away from a centre, and therefore is neither light nor heavy. A very beautiful logic one must admit. His moon had the status of a 'primary body', one that is 'eternal and not subject to increase or diminution, but unaging and unalterable and unmodified...' Aristotle's moon was made of divine substance, because '... all men have some conception of the nature of the gods... and agree in allotting

the highest place to the deity, surely because they suppose that the immortal is linked with the immortal and regard any other suppositon as inconceivable.’ Today, it is as inconceivable that this ‘primary body is something else beyond earth, fire, air and water... (with) a name of its own, aether, derived from the fact that it “runs always” for an eternity of time.’ For Aristotle, and for Newton, ‘The mere evidence of our senses is enough to prove this.’<sup>26</sup> To our senses, this is a truly astonishing false claim. We now know that the entire universe will one day implode.

Dawood is a Calvino-esque transcendentalist mechanic whose work aims to assure us that the moon will, once again, succeed in assuming a form and glow. One could say that he is a gambler who has perfected a number of deft ways to shuffle and reshuffle the deck. He is a diviner who frees what we know from its rigid taxonomic restraints. The rational world objectified as ‘realistic’, and the perceptual world objectified as ‘fictional’, are in his cosmology and theophany both illusions that must be dispersed as so much fog in order that another, third world be revealed as an inter-zone, a material one that exists coevally and co-spatially alongside, or more properly put, interwoven with the other two.

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<sup>1</sup> See Plato’s first dialogue, *Ion*. Socrates ‘demonstrates’ that even though Ion is able to recite Homer’s entire *Iliad* and *Odyssey* from memory, and of moving his audience, he does so through channeling the inspiration of the gods, and therefore possesses no knowledge himself. My point here is that Plato himself, by writing down Socrates’ actual philosophical conversations, becomes an imitator no different than Ion.

<sup>2</sup> See Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, vols. I and II (1951, 1958).

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1967, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1976, p. 163.

<sup>4</sup> Shezad Dawood, email correspondence with author, September 2011.

<sup>5</sup> The full citation is: ‘... when I happened to read that sentence of Albert Einstein’s: “That there are no fixed points in space”, I thought, indeed, if there are no fixed points, then every point is equally interesting and equally changing. Merce Cunningham and Jacqueline Lesscheave, ‘Torso: There are no fixed points in space’ (1998), in Alexandra Carter and Janet, O’Shea, eds., *The Routledge dance studies reader*, Routledge, London, 2010, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*. Vintage, London, 1997, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1969, fn. 10, p. 351.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Delany, *The Jewels of Aptom*, Bantam, London, 1982.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Corbin, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 214–15.

<sup>11</sup> For Derrida’s views on nationalism see his *Monolingualism of the Other: OR, The Prosthesis of Origin*, translated by Patrick Mensah, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore & London, 1988, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Shezad Dawood, ‘The New Dream Machine Project’, in Sharmini Pareira, ed., *Footnote to a Project: The 2011 Abraaj Capital Art Prize*, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>16</sup> William S. Burroughs, ‘Face to Face’, *Oui*, August 1973.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>18</sup> Fredric Jameson, ‘Fear and Loathing in Globalization’, in *New Left Review*, No. 23, Sep / Oct 1993, pp. 105–14.

<sup>19</sup> Compare briefly to Robert Longo’s *Johnny Mnemonic* and Mike Kelly.

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.acidmothers.com>.

<sup>21</sup> Spoken by the Alien Mother, leader of mission.

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000, p. 205.

<sup>23</sup> George Adamski, *Inside the Spaceships*, The George Adamsky Foundation, Los Angeles.

<sup>24</sup> See David Curtis, Al Rees, Duncan White, eds., *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film*, Tate Publishing, London, 2011; and my essay in *Socialimagistics and the Fourth Avant-garde of Stan Vanderbeek*.

<sup>25</sup> Italo Calvino, *Mr. Palomar*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, San Diego, CA, 1985, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *De Caelo*, Book I, Chapter 3, 270b, pp. 1-31.